

# OXFORD

## MAGAZINE

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WHEN we, as co-editors, discuss how to respond to the latest of the high-profile politically sensitive issues regularly embroiling the University it happens that, often, we initially come at such subjects from different starting points. But we have necessarily, as in the case of this editorial, to end up agreeing on our combined considered position. This is just as it should be in a university. A university community will, and should, embrace as wide a spectrum of voices as possible and at the same time it ought to be able to provide the means for frank, rigorous and open-minded exchange, ending up—hopefully—with conclusions democratically agreeable to all.

Currently the issues arousing particular controversy include trans rights, anti-Semitism, decolonisation (of the curriculum, statutory, museum collections and the naming of spaces). Problem areas such as these are reflections of themes circulating in society generally but in a university they tend to be highlighted by students, and sometimes with particular intensity involving tactics such as no-platforming. Considerable resources in time and personnel—and stress—may be involved. In this university we tend to accept, and even admire, student activ-

## Sharing Values

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ism—the cutting of the teeth of many a future career in national politics—and see it as part of the numerous extra-academic experiences our students can benefit from at Oxford.

And yet recent trends in the conduct of campaigning go well beyond the norms of acceptability and risk getting out of hand. Exploitation of social media all too easily amounts to bullying and harassment. We read increasingly of academics hounded—their jobs even threatened—as the result of the pressures generated by

offended fellow-academics (egged on by the press as well as student campaigning) sometimes apparently triggered by little more than a particular use of words or an ill-considered tweet many years previously. We are fortunate that, seemingly, nobody has lost their job in this way in Oxford, due no doubt to the Vice-Chancellor's admirably robust attitude to free speech.\* Academics, accustomed to nuance and ill-equipped as they are for the new modes of intemperate communication which many find distasteful, seem obliged more and more to notice, and take sides on, such mobilisation of opinions.

Oxford cannot avoid these highly controversial situations where real-world decisions are required—an ex-

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We are unable to publish the *Oxford Magazine* in print for the foreseeable future, as a result of COVID19-related working restrictions. Arrangements for archival copies will be made at a later date.

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ample being the imminent decision on the fate of Oriel's Rhodes statue—and perhaps we have not yet developed the best possible ways of dealing with them collectively. One wonders, for example, how All Souls' decision to re-name the Codrington Library was arrived at; did all the Fellows agree or was the decision contested (and if so, were the arguments pro and contra fully spelt out and debated in a timely manner)? Was there a secret vote? Why the half-measure, leaving the Codrington statue in its place? What factional pressures were put on the college, a college without students and without reliance on the financial support of alumni? None of this is likely to become publicly known.

Occasional examples such as this may seem to be of purely local concern and the considerations may have been very specific, but such (often finely balanced) decisions have symbolic significance and wider implications, including encouraging the targeting of further examples (quite possibly with limited awareness of the original situation and arguments). The reputation of the University as a whole is inevitably involved.

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In such high-profile campaigns we are usually struggling with what are fundamentally different value systems in opposition: highly complex perspectives are often reduced to matters of mere word usage and presented as stark binary choices. In a university context we are accustomed to examining and exploring alternative positions, often through the clarification of basic assumptions underlying the unsuspectedly mutually incomprehensible meanings of words. If in the end consensus fails to result at least the academic approach will have taught respect for the arguments and will have achieved a better understanding of the possibility of multiple, equally cogent value systems.

We all believe in democracy and this is fundamental to Oxford's version of it, Congregation. This is the guardian of how the University is run. It is imperfect—not all employees are included—but it covers all with the most direct and long-term stakes in the institution. It has a good track record of allowing both sides of an argument to be expressed; Congregation meetings are respectful and equality of esteem prevails; voting is secret (although

named voting slips are verified by the Proctors). Despite its formalities Congregation sets the example in terms of a considered decision-making process on matters of often controversial and fundamental policy.

A second, and connected, matter is the representation of students in a university like ours. Students are only remotely part of our democratic structure. They do not, for example, play a part in staff appointments (in contrast to the situation among some universities internationally or the appointments of Chancellorships/ Rectorships in some British universities). Although student representatives sit on most University (and college) committees they are not equal members; they are (uncontroversially) excluded from certain (especially personal) agenda items. The students have long had their most equal representation at 'Joint Consultative Committees' in each department.

Only recently have student campaigns for changes in the curriculum come particularly to the fore, bolstered by their rights as 'consumers' paying £9,250 annual fees. To respond urgently and hurriedly to such calls (especially when recommended to do so by high-level committees in the administration) is to undermine the complex and inherently ill-defined nature of curricula, especially in the Humanities. One generation of students soon enough becomes the next generation of early career academics, through whom curriculum change can and will evolve naturally through consensual debate with more established academics.

Again one has to go back to the nature and purpose of a university. Students attend university to be taught: a university is primarily for teaching. Teaching involves an asymmetric relation in which the taught have, by definition, to accept the greater expertise and experience of the teacher. In Oxford, through the tutorial system and everything that stems from it, we are fortunate that students can answer back to their teachers and if necessary agree to differ. The exchange is mutually respectful and both learn in the process. This is as it should be in a university.

B.B., T.J.H

\* The Government is increasingly seeking to intervene in this area; see the recent Report from the Department of Education, "Higher Education: free speech and academic freedom" (February, 2021).

## NOTICE

The Editors of the *Oxford Magazine* regret that they cannot publish any material submitted to them anonymously. If the author requests publication on the basis that the author's name and university address be withheld from the readership, the Editors will consider the reasons given and in their discretion may publish on that basis; otherwise the material will be returned to the author.

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# Home and Away: cross-currents of regulatory policy in Australia and the UK

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ANTHONY McCLARAN

DAVID Palfreyman, in the preceding issue of *Oxford Magazine* (No 430, 8th Week, HT 2021), invited us to consider the historical observation that, “over recent decades, Australia has often led the way in HE reforms, to be followed a little later by very similar policy changes in the UK”. It’s a view I’ve had plenty of opportunities to consider (not least on the long flights to and from downunder) as I moved from the UK HE sector to the Australian in 2015 and then back again in 2020. The perspective is concentrated on regulatory policy in higher education and is inevitably shaped by my particular roles: as Chief Executive of QAA here, then CEO of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA, Australia’s national HE regulator) in Melbourne, and now in London as Vice-Chancellor of an old institution, but young university, at St Mary’s, Twickenham, and regulated rather than regulating.

When established by the Australian federal parliament in 2011, TEQSA certainly set the model for a new approach to HE regulation, or “external quality assurance”. The approach—risk-based, data-driven, and with a firm legislative basis—was certainly influential, not least because TEQSA was the first national regulator to put the approach into practice. Some parts of the higher education world—most notably the US—looked and didn’t like what they saw: an attack, they thought, on university autonomy and the more genteel traditions of academic audit, quality assurance and the institutional visits by teams of academic experts that had characterised the approach of TEQSA’s predecessor, the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA).

In Australia’s version of what Sir David Watson memorably described as the ‘Quality Wars’ (“Who killed what in the quality wars?”, *QAA Briefing Paper*, Dec 2006), AUQA spoke the language of quality assurance and enhancement; TEQSA was unambiguously regulatory in both tone and intent. Other jurisdictions, seeking the sensitivity to institutional diversity, reduction in regulatory burden, greater accountability and cost-effective regulation of rapidly expanding HE sectors promised by the advocates of a risk-based approach, eagerly sought to incorporate features of the Australian model in their own systems. In an illustration of David Palfreyman’s observation, the adoption of risk-based frameworks was a feature of the process of reform of HE regulation in England that ultimately resulted in the establishment of the Office for Students in 2017/18.

The creation of a national regulator in the form of TEQSA was a key element of the Australian government’s 10-year reform agenda, *Transforming Australia’s Higher Education System* (2009); indeed, if you accept the view of the Howard Partners’ report, *Rethinking Australian Higher Education* (2021) to which David Palfreyman directs our attention, it is the only objective from that list to have been achieved over the decade (other views are available). Even in Australia, though, TEQSA’s robust

approach to its regulatory duties attracted critics, and those voices grew in number and volume in a remarkably short period of time. Established by statute in 2011 and operational in 2012, the infant TEQSA found itself under critical national review at the government’s request in 2013. The resulting report (*Review of Higher Education Regulation*) by the eminent experts Professors Kwong Lee Dow and Valerie Braithwaite led, simply put, to a very significant clipping of TEQSA’s wings, not to mention a steep reduction in both its financial and staff resourcing. Dow and Braithwaite called for a sharp scaling back of the reporting burden which risk assessment placed on providers (TEQSA’s original framework had over 40 risk indicators—the current version has 12) and, in particular, for TEQSA to cease engaging in sector-wide or ‘thematic’ assessments of issues such as the quality of providers’ third party arrangements or their English language requirements. There was criticism of what Dow and Braithwaite described as a ‘one size fits all’ approach to risk assessment which, it was argued, meant that the key purpose of a risk-based approach (to focus attention, resource and regulatory action on the areas of high risk) was being subverted, with consequent burdens for universities that in reality offered very little risk at all. In an illustration of the fact that Australian-UK influence on these matters flows in both directions, the report noted approvingly the contrasted approach taken by the QAA and HEFCE:

*“The United Kingdom’s Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and its supervisory regulator—the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)—have adopted a risk-based approach to regulation. However, the QAA/HEFCE’s approach to identifying risk is pragmatically far less scoped and detailed than TEQSA; with institutional track record providing the test for risk—rather than probabilities or formalized risk indicators.”*

Dow and Braithwaite were highly critical of a regulatory approach which seemed to treat higher education institutions as simply ‘objects’ of regulation, in which, “the regulator makes a demand and the regulatee complies with the demand”. Instead, the report argued, TEQSA should regulate as a partner, recognising “the expertise, knowledge and commitment of the party [the HE providers] being regulated”.

The government accepted all the report’s recommendations. Of particular significance was the instruction to TEQSA to cease engaging in sector-wide quality reviews, which, under the bland title of *Ministerial Direction No. 2 of 2013*, required that TEQSA should, “only [work] on sectoral quality assessment activities if TEQSA has surplus resources after fully achieving [its regulatory] tasks and priorities”.

Fast forward to 2021—why might any of this regulatory history be of interest now? Well, even by the time I arrived at TEQSA in 2015, it was very clear that the ‘sector-wide’ issues were not going away for HE regulation in

Australia or indeed anywhere else. In fact, it is precisely the thematic, cross-cutting issues that engage the interest of the media, politicians and the public in a way that the routine quality reviews aimed at confirming, yet again, that well-resourced, successful, over-subscribed universities are ‘high quality’ often fail to do. But when, for example, a major TV documentary suggests that international students are being admitted without adequate English language, or campaigners argue that there is a crisis of sexual assaults and harassment on campuses, or that the easy availability of paid-for (‘contract’) cheating services is a major problem, or that ‘cancel culture’ is eroding academic freedom, then governments (and, sometimes but not invariably, voters and taxpayers behind them) understandably want some answers and assurance – and there is an expectation that the regulator will have a view (and take any necessary action), particularly when, as in TEQSA’s case, that regulator has a statutory responsibility to “protect and enhance Australia’s reputation for quality higher education”.

And so, issue by issue, it became necessary for TEQSA to reengage with “sectoral quality assessment activities” and to be resourced to do so. Indeed, the reengagement often came through a direct ministerial request. Concerns about a lack of clarity in HE admissions requirements, with consequent disadvantage particularly to those applicants already disadvantaged in other ways, led to a review and then an Admissions Transparency Implementation Plan in 2017. A report by the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) on the extent of incidents of sexual assault and harassment on campuses across the country (*Change the Course*, 2017) prompted a government request to TEQSA to survey how the HE sector was responding to the report’s recommendations, with a report back to the Minister in 2019, together with a request to publish guidance on good practice for the sector. Media coverage of problems encountered by overseas students whose English language ability was, allegedly, insufficient to cope with the courses to which they had been admitted led to TEQSA reviewing the position on the ground through a survey of all providers, followed by compliance assessments of ten universities. Growing evidence of the widespread nature and criminal links of so-called contract cheating sites and services culminated in the government passing legislation to make such sites illegal and establishing a Higher Education Integrity Unit at TEQSA (about which, more below) to provide resources for, and to work with, HE providers in tackling the problem.

In some cases, particular issues led to the involvement of agencies or individuals other than the national regulator; academic freedom and cybersecurity are good examples. Sir Michael Barber’s Commemoration Lecture delivered at King’s College, London earlier this year (and extracted in the preceding issue of *Oxford Magazine*) addressed perceived problems of freedom of speech and academic freedom in higher education. In Australia, the issue, and its manifestation in a (relatively small) number of campus incidents, have been the subject of extensive media coverage. In response the government, in 2019, called on the Hon. Robert French, retired Chief Justice of Australia and Chancellor of the University of Western Australia, to review the matter. The result was a Model Code on Freedom of Speech, offered to, but not imposed upon, Australian universities.

Cybersecurity came into sharp focus as a result of a massive security breach at the Australian National University

(home of the National Security College) in 2018 which allowed hackers to access 19 years’ worth of personal information for staff and students. The government’s response focused on the establishment of a University Foreign Interference Taskforce.

But these issues were exceptions, deemed to require specialist expertise (respectively from the legal world and the national security agencies), and were in any case linked back to TEQSA’s regulatory work through clarifying specific expectations found in more general form in the Higher Education Standards Framework, the basis for TEQSA’s regulatory work. Given the wider range of recent sector-wide developments and the wish to involve the regulator in them, usually directly, in response to public concern, it’s perhaps not surprising that an independent review of the impact of the TEQSA Act (the legislation that had established the agency in 2011), concluded in its subsequent report to government that *Ministerial Direction No.2* of 2013 should be repealed, clearing the way for sector-wide and thematic assessments to reassume their place in the regulatory tool-box.

That the regulator is now fully involved once again in ‘sectoral quality assessment’ is clear both in TEQSA’s inaugural ‘compliance report’, published in March this year, and in the establishment of a national Higher Education Integrity Unit, based at TEQSA. The compliance report flags the agency’s “compliance priorities” for the coming year and they include the sector-wide issues of *Safeguarding people* (including dealing with sexual assault and harassment), *Protecting sector integrity* (tackling academic fraud, unregistered providers and contract cheating), *Maintaining information security* (including “inadequate system protection” and intellectual property) and, with particular relevance after a year in which the impact of the pandemic on HE business models has been profoundly disruptive, *Monitoring financial standing*.

The Higher Education Integrity Unit will, according to TEQSA, “enhance our capacity to work with the higher education sector and government agencies to identify and respond to emerging integrity risks within the sector”.

Do any of these issues resonate in the UK in 2021? In England, at least, they do. As in Australia, it is precisely the sector-wide issues that command political and public attention. QAA is campaigning for legislation to outlaw contract cheating; the Secretary of State proposes to legislate for a Free Speech and Academic Freedom Champion and to require the OfS to introduce a new registration condition on free speech and academic freedom; the government is consulting on a post-qualifications admissions system, intended to ‘level-up’ HE admissions which “lack transparency”; and, in the wake of the growing evidence highlighted on the *Everyone’s Invited* website of widespread sexual assault and harassment in educational settings, including universities, the sector awaits the revised ‘statement of expectations’ for providers on the responses to and management of cases of sexual assault and harassment.

Michael Barber, in the speech referred to above, said that he doesn’t “believe the widely held view that what happens now in America is necessarily a sign of things to come here”. By directing our attention to Australia, David Palfreyman may well be nearer the mark.

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# The Road to Academic Debasement

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PETER OPPENHEIMER

IN Britain “it is almost part of the DNA that you don’t boast, you don’t blow your own trumpet and you do not fill people’s ears with rhetoric every few minutes about how wonderful you are.”

The statement is from a recent letter in *The Guardian*. As it happens, the writer was concerned with the flying of national flags, the Union flag in particular. But he (it was a he) could just as well have been addressing recent Vice-Chancellors of Oxford University. These have drifted in from outside, strangers to the institution. One would have wished them to develop harmonious relations with the academic community. Instead, they have been swiftly hoisted to the pinnacle of a dysfunctional governance structure, in which that same community, nominally still sovereign and self-governing, is in practice side-lined, disempowered and manipulated by central officialdom. The latter puffs itself as “professional services”, rather than mere “support staff”. The current Vice-Chancellor makes periodic calls for solidarity, duly echoed or amplified by senior functionaries and other suppliers of “professional services”.

Oxford is not, of course, alone in its disarray. During 2020 a string of public utterances, among them a joint Ministerial Paper from the Departments for Education and for Business, expressed alarm at proliferating bureaucracy and crumbling academic standards across Britain’s higher education sector. I referenced several in “Virus-Ridden Governance” (*Oxford Magazine*, No. 424, Second Week, Michaelmas Term 2020). An early item which there escaped my attention was also in *The Guardian*. Columnist Owen Jones wrote in mid-February 2020—several weeks, he it noted, before the first UK lockdown—about the “wrecking” of English universities in particular. Not quite ten years on from the trebling of tuition fees, which was supposed to initiate a “golden age” of effectiveness and of meeting student needs, the sector was tottering:

*“nearly a quarter of English universities are in deficit.... Universities academics are up in arms about their growing workload and lack of job security: 70 percent of higher education researchers are stuck on fixed-term contracts. Under financial pressure to get ‘bums on seats’, universities are splashing cash on advertising and ‘flashy buildings’ to impress visitors, and presiding over rampant grade inflation: the number of first-class degrees has shot up 80 percent since the introduction of tuition fees.... Students are taking on huge debts for increasingly poor-value degrees taught by overstressed, underpaid, precarious staff....”*

More than many other universities, Oxford can survive central mismanagement. Its collegiate character and its reputational legacy (including its position in league tables) protect it. But only up to a point. The question is how far the unbridled rule of central officialdom will lead, or is leading, by one route and another, to debasement of the academic coinage. The following paragraphs reflect on some examples, related as appropriate to the observations of Owen Jones.

\* \* \*

Begin with the ‘flashy buildings’ syndrome. This is essentially make-work for the Estates Division, future as well as present, and for the professional compilers of “Strategic Plans”. More than one set of Oxford Proctors—spokespersons for academe—has voiced unease on the subject over the past decade. What is referred to as the rolling capital programme, along with separately designated IT projects, does indeed roll on implacably, like Old Man River, from triennium to triennium, with hardly a glance at academic priorities. The most glaring instance to date is just around the corner. This is the Stephen A. Schwarzman so-called Centre for the Humanities, likely to cost the University a net £150 million in matching funds, unjustified by any current need for new spaces, and gratuitously occupying an important city-centre site whose use should be left to future University generations. In short, a real shocker.

Next, ‘advertising’. In this case, awareness advertising. Specifically, awareness of the issues of climate change and biodiversity. The two issues are to a large extent distinct, and are awkwardly joined together under the label of Environmental Sustainability.

A ponderous document titled “Environmental Sustainability Strategy” was issued in draft on 18th November 2020 (Supplement [1] to *O.U. Gazette* No. 5293—Vol. 151) “as part of the University-wide consultation with staff and students on behalf of the Planning and Resource Allocation Committee”. A final version followed four months later, on 24th March 2021 (Supplement [2] to *O.U. Gazette* No. 5307)—with, hilariously, just one significant change: the earlier draft had not seen fit to mention, as a factor of possible relevance to University activities in the period ahead, the COVID 19 pandemic! Not only was this a nice indication of just how engaged in their assignment were the two-dozen-odd members of the Environmental Stability Strategy Working Group. In then repairing the omission, they—or rather the authors—had the gall to claim that “we could not have foreseen how quickly our lives changed...” Why ever not? Well, you see, “The March 2020 lockdown started just weeks after we had opened our consultation....”. Yes, and a mere *seven months* before the draft document was signed off by PRAC for publication!

Sustainability is not, however, the sole or even principal object of the exercise. As the document reminds us, “The University has already worked for many years to reduce its environmental impact”—in line with growing world-wide consciousness and action. What we are now seeing is more strident and self-satisfied publicity, along with scattered updating of facts and figures. Those parts which address, in the document’s words, “the negative impact of our own operations”, such as energy consumption in University buildings or travel by University staff and students, are mildly interesting—or at least would be so, if the associated data were consistent and comprehensible. Other parts are pure virtue-signalling and abuse of language. A sentence like “The University is already playing a leading role in tackling these issues through the application

of its research, policy advice and educating its students”, besides radiating complacency, identifies no measurable impact whatever. Verbiage about “three pillars of sustainability: social, economic and environmental. The University takes action on economic and social sustainability in other areas, such as access and participation, race equality and closing its gender pay gap” is conceptual balderdash.

The unifying thread in all this material is the central administration’s assertion of control over University affairs. At no stage does the legally sovereign assembly of Congregation enter the picture. The “University-wide consultation with staff and students” was a matter of random exchanges between officials at the centre and individuals on the periphery. It could, for all one knows, be a complete fabrication. The ultimate give-away is what the document describes as the “four enablers underpinning” the Strategy. First of the four is “Embedding environmental sustainability in the University’s governance and decision-making”. That is, extending the central administration’s bureaucratic tentacles through creation of a 14-member Environmental Sustainability Sub-committee of the Planning and Resource Allocation Committee. One can almost see the twitching nostrils of assorted Pro-Vice-Chancellors and other hierarchs. They could hardly wait. The University’s ESS having been “approved”, i.e. rubber-stamped, by Council on 15th March 2021, the birth of the new Subcommittee was officially notified a mere ten days later. Meanwhile 18th March had seen a remote Staff Forum on the subject. And the Strategy is being formally launched with drumrolls and a ceremonial lecture on 7th May.

The remaining three “enablers” are in effect agenda items for the new subcommittee: “developing a system of annual reporting of carbon emissions and biodiversity impact...”; “establishing a policy to guide our use of carbon offsetting and biodiversity offsetting”; and “establishing the Oxford Sustainability Fund to fund the programme of action required to reach net zero carbon and biodiversity net gain by 2035”. Two further comments may help to put all this noise into perspective. First, it actually makes no sense for Oxford University—whether defined as excluding or including the colleges—to set itself up as a self-contained generator of net zero carbon (or for that matter of net biodiversity gain). The University is at once far too large and far too small an entity. It should rather continue to take matters in its stride, piecemeal and *ad hoc*, not unlike households—which are gradually adjusting their travel habits, vehicles, diet, power usage (including home insulation, boilers and solar panels), financial dispositions and so forth. Particular decisions and timings are influenced by the price and availability of products and facilities, as well as appropriately qualified installation personnel—all of which depend in their turn on industrial capacities, on government policies and on types of education not obtainable from Oxford.

Second, the financial numbers variously trotted out in this context are far from enlightening. The Staff Forum on 18/3 was told (via a slide) that the forthcoming Oxford Sustainability Fund would be spending some £200m over 15 years, i.e. between 2020 and 2035. The tabulation at the end of the ESS document shows, for the same period, aggregate “Outline Costs of Implementing the Strategy” equal to £447m, of which £210m on capital and £237m on current (infelicitously termed “Revenue”) account. Never mind the mystery of where the Sustain-

ability Fund comes into the story. And perhaps it does not matter that more than half the £210m figure for capital comprises “Maintenance”, which is in principle a current and not a capital item. The important point is that the aggregate of £447m measures inputs, whereas benefits (or reduced disbenefits) to Sustainability are outputs, and are not straightforwardly measurable in money terms. In the circumstances, perhaps the most thought-provoking comparison one can make is that £447m over 15 years happens to more or less match the cost of the superfluous portion of Oxford’s central administrative personnel.

The particular relevance of the last point is that central administration is always on the look-out for fresh means to justify its bloated existence; if these help also to extend its sphere of command and control, so much the better. Move on, therefore, from Owen Jones’ “advertising” to his plummeting of degree standards. Oxford, in one of the Vice-Chancellor’s favourite phrases, is “leading the way.” And an important reason is the central administration’s drive to assume the role of academic welfare inspectorate, ensuring that students are protected from any mental strains or discomfort at the hands of their teachers and examiners.

The recent headline target in this context is so-called coloniality or Euro-centricity of the curriculum, held responsible in some quarters for most of the alleged “persistent awarding gap between black, Asian and minority ethnic students and their white peers at Oxford.” But this was not initially the centre of attention, as I shall point out. Meanwhile, the foregoing quotation comes from a lengthy document (archly called a “resource”) drafted by the central administration’s Centre for Teaching and Learning, and circulated selectively—whether on criteria of race is unclear, but certainly to persons expected to find its message congenial. In other words, we have here yet another variation on the theme of excluding Congregation from any role in University policymaking: less crudely conspiratorial than the creation of Parks/Reuben College, but probably more manipulative than the “University-wide consultation” on climate change. Recipients of the resource are to send responses to the CTL by Monday 17th May 2021 (Fourth week of this Term).

Equally regrettable is that the CTL sees no need to cite evidence in support of various categorical assertions—such as, “A decolonised curriculum is recognised as a more accurate, relevant and anti-racist form of curriculum that reflects and represents our global academic community; it does not simply remove content and replace it with new content, but instead contextualises knowledge and values multiple perspectives, not solely Western/Euro-centric intellectual tradition.” Presumably the demand for evidence counts as part of Western intellectual tradition, and is therefore optional. On the other hand, the CTL does opt to cite the above-mentioned “awarding gap” as grounds for curriculum change. The reasoning is again wobbly, since the CTL further reminds us that the University “has committed to eliminate all gaps in attainment that are not explainable by gaps in prior attainment or by differences in course choice by 2029-30.” Taking this commitment at face value, any curriculum will do. That each and every faculty is entitled and expected to adjust its curricula over time as it sees fit does not need saying. For the CTL (which should not exist anyhow) to seek to regiment the process and to declare that “It is the re-

sponsibility of **all teaching staff** [in bold] to work towards decolonising the curriculum” is pompous nonsense.

The CTL also makes the unspoken assumption that the assessment gap stems exclusively from under-marking of non-whites. It does not consider how much may be a side-effect of over-marking the white majority, in other words of the general relaxation in examination standards. When 97 percent of candidates end up with either a First or a 2.1, they obviously include a significant number who under more demanding conditions would have merited a 2.2 or a Third. It is plausible too to imagine that whites are considerably more adept, and considerably less restrained, at exploiting the assorted whinge factors *aka* “mitigating circumstances processes” nowadays available in connection with exams.

The trebling of tuition fees as from 2012 evidently gave fresh impetus to the dropping of assessment standards. Student-consumers ending up with big debts were entitled to have bought themselves “good” degrees. It is important, however, not to forget that academic staff had already been incentivised through the governance machinery not to devote too much time and effort to teaching and examining. Interestingly, this point came up at the same Open Forum in December 2020 which launched the Race Equality Task Force and, by extension, the CTL’s initiative. Matt Jarvis, an Associate Head of the MPLS Division, regretted that rewards (e.g. under “Recognition of Distinction”) typically go “to people who bring in the most money and do the best research, without recourse to how they run their group and how they act as a mentor for the younger people...”

Probably few of to-day’s academic personnel are aware of the historical arrangement whereby examination candidates constrained by sickness (in the broadest sense) to sit only some fraction of their scheduled Finals could be awarded an unclassified honours degree with the Latin tag of *aegrotat*. The COVID pandemic might have been the occasion for an imaginative extension of this device to the entire cohort of Finalists. Instead, a simulacrum of Finals was conducted with the help of “open-book exams” and “digital assessments”. It remains to be seen whether these prove to be permanent innovations. Either way, we have reached a state of affairs where the term “*aegrotat*” aptly describes not one person’s degree, but the whole paraphernalia of undergraduate Finals at Oxford.

The next issue of Oxford  
Magazine will appear in  
second week

## Zanzibar

The stranded house  
stands, alone,  
immaculate,  
on the weed-strewn shore,  
bleached by sea-salt,  
wind and sun.

Long sash-windows  
on each side  
of a neat porch  
all coated in boards—  
cosy, faintly  
risible.

Question: why is  
that strange name  
above the door?  
Was it someone’s dream  
of Africa  
in Orkney?

There should be hints  
of spices—  
cloves, cinnamon—  
windruffled red sails,  
dhows ploughing down  
furrowed waves.

There should be loud,  
dry chatter  
of parched palm fronds,  
conch shells, gourds and beans  
piled on jumbled  
market stalls.

Here, pale north shades,  
faded grey,  
the thwack of waves,  
fat, boiling clouds  
causing dark stains  
on kind hills.

Here, autumn sun,  
not burning,  
leggy shadows  
on rain-soaked marram  
beyond scattered beach  
detritus.

Maybe, coming home  
to Blighty,  
nostalgia seized  
the retired D.O.,  
who named the hut  
“Zanzibar”,

conjuring past,  
better times,  
bridge at the club,  
hot nights, girls, pink gin,  
his dear, dead wife,  
scented air.

First published in *Spirit of People and Place*, edited by R. Stepney and A. Landale (Walcot Books, 2020).

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## My Chekhov

Someone (I don't know who) once said  
that Chekhov plays were all about  
waiting, napping and complaining.  
I am living one now, reaching  
down deep into my hinterland  
to remember how long it's been  
since I made a trip to Moscow  
or how I might soon take to drink.

There's a kind of desperation  
in the air, a quiet exhaustion  
that pulls at the fringes of life,  
unravels the careful fabric  
of memory so that it seems  
as if I have no past, neither  
any perceivable future,  
living a segregated life.

While the rest of the world outside  
the estate discovers riches  
and rewards, I moulder on here,  
safe but not sound, in mind at least,  
often looking out of windows,  
hating the patterned wallpaper,  
shouting at the wild wind that tugs  
the house that imitates a ship.

I say that I miss my father,  
that without him I have no goal  
for him to observe and approve.  
What about unrequited love,  
without which there is no Chekhov,  
each looking at the wrong person  
until love withers on the bough?

In a bold step to leave this stage  
I will change to the Russian style  
of treating its most famous son  
as purveyor of comedy,  
shrugging off all that is dismal,  
playing for laughs 'til the stage rings  
with the glad sounds of mirth and joy  
and the promise of Moscow's lights.

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## A walk in the time of plague

Air so clear that we see  
ourselves, prisms, refracted  
against the shock of green.  
We are fugitives, tracing  
the dry cow-hoof tracks  
that wander up and down  
the quiet fields, up the crest  
towards the crown of beech.

Birds flirt in the copse  
then go quiet, as if they hear  
rumours of ghosts from before.  
But this is now, and the day  
spreads blue and yellow –  
the world seems as far  
away as the thought of  
being free once more.

MO BROWNE

Born in Peshawar, Mo Browne spent her early childhood in Shanghai and later intermittently in India, with school in the UK. A large part of her working life has been in publishing. She has been writing poetry for about three decades, getting awards in three poetry competitions and publication recently in an anthology. She lives in Chipping Norton.

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## Teaching-only academics arrive in Oxbridge

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G.R.EVANS

CAMBRIDGE is currently proposing the creation of teaching-only academic posts. What are the implications? What are the reasons for this apparent devaluation of the role of the academic whose contract now typically involves the requirement to undertake research alongside teaching? Might Oxford be approaching a similar position?

The *Lindop Report* of 1985 set out a key principle of protection of standards in the exercise of degree-awarding powers. It stressed that:

*'traditionally the university degree was an acknowledgement, by the self-governing community of scholars which constituted the university in its wider sense, of academic attainment such as to warrant full membership of the community'.*

In a House of Commons Written Answer on 17 March 1986 Sir Keith Joseph added:

*'that the most effective safeguard of an institution's academic standards is the existence within it of a strong, cohesive and self-critical academic community.'*



Cambridge would certainly claim it has one of those. The 'self-critical academic community' requires two things of its members: a level of personal academic expertise which equips them to set those standards and a degree of security in their jobs which emboldens them to stand firm against any management pressure to lower standards (for example by awarding more and more first-class degrees). Government still considers all this to be important as was evident in the debates during the framing of *Higher Education and Reform Act 2017*.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1980s the necessary academic expertise was deemed to be guaranteed, or at least protected, by the research efforts of academics. They were expected to be adding to knowledge in their fields by writing articles and books adding discoveries original in their fields. Since then expectations have changed. The range of subjects taught in universities has expanded enormously, to include the vocational and the professional as well as the traditionally 'academic'. I remember hearing a Minister explain at a conference two decades ago that 'scholarship' was just a matter of keeping up with what was published in one's subject. It was enough to keep up with reading the latest books and articles. It was not necessary to be writing them.

In 2004 in England and Wales it became openly possible for an institution which offered only taught and not research degrees to gain 'university title'. Academic job security has changed too. Education Reform Act 1988 took away academic tenure but a series of subsequent adjustments nationally and within institutions have weakened the provisions put in place under the Act to protect academics from being made redundant. The higher education press has recently included a number of examples of mass redundancies of academic researchers, to the point where *Times Higher Education* published an article on April 1 criticising several universities which had made large numbers of their teaching-and-research staff redundant but still put their research into the University's TEF list.<sup>2</sup> Those staff had commonly been offered the choice of agreeing to move to a 'teaching-only' contract or accepting redundancy. I have seen the documentation in the course of case-work. This should send shivers down the spine even of those fortunate enough to be employed in Oxford or Cambridge on traditional teaching-and-research contracts.

Cambridge's new proposal is therefore disturbing in the light of the diminution of expectations it embodies. The story goes back some years. On 16 July 2014 the *Cambridge Reporter* published a *Report of the General Board On the establishment of the University offices of Lecturer (teaching) and Senior Lecturer (teaching)*.<sup>3</sup> At that time the offices of Language Teaching Officer (Grade 8) and Senior Language Teaching Officer (Grade 9) were established but classed merely as 'academic-related'. In Cambridge 'officers' still have the relative security of guaranteed employment to retirement age, and carry the privilege of the special protections against redundancy of Cambridge's counterpart to Statute XII. This *Report* was an attempt to give teaching-only academics the advantages of better 'established' posts with the privileges of the University Teaching Officers. They were far fewer in number than the unestablished short-term contract researchers who had no security of tenure and with their contracts readily ended when the external funding for their projects finished.

This *Report* was discussed on 14 October 2014. The Chair of the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages expressed concerns. Language teachers spoke to complain that insufficient information had been given in the *Report*.<sup>4</sup> The Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Institutional Affairs explained that the aim was chiefly to tidy up confusions. There was a small number of 'currently unestablished, appointments at Grade 9 held on open-ended contracts, mainly in scientific Departments, whose duties are primarily concerned with teaching'. These were variously funded and 'made in a piecemeal fashion, by informal appointments processes'. 'The absence of a formal structure for these important posts is profoundly unsatisfactory', he said, and it 'poses risks around quality control for the delivery and continuity of teaching'.

He was aware of 'claims by some that the creation of these offices creates a precedent by breaching the traditional link between teaching and research'. But he pointed out that the existence already of 'established offices of Language Teaching Officer and Senior Language Teaching Officer' had not meant that 'the intellectual roof' had 'collapsed onto the School of Arts and Humanities or onto the Department of Engineering'. The proposal was moved onto a back burner.

A Notice in the *Reporter* of 20 June 2018 acknowledged the lack of progress and 'the delay in taking forward a career structure for Language Teaching Officers, further to a review of their arrangements in the School of Arts and Humanities'. It promised more action soon:

*'The Council wishes to confirm that it is planned that proposals for senior teaching-only staff will be put forward during the 2018–19 academical year and that these proposals will take account of the recommendations made further to the review of language teaching arrangements.'*<sup>5</sup>

Work would meanwhile continue 'on the development of a career progression scheme for senior teaching-only staff'.<sup>6</sup> It was mentioned that the Academic Career Pathway then in development was intended to include this possibility. That would not be ready to roll out for some time,<sup>7</sup> and was postponed further in the light of Discussion remarks,<sup>8</sup> with a further hiccup when academic promotions were paused during the Covid-19 suspension of governance in 2020.

\* \* \*

There is now a new *Report*,<sup>9</sup> due to be Discussed on 20 April, proposing a far broader category of teaching-only staff. This is no longer a mere tidying up in the positions of a relatively small number of staff, appointed as 'teaching-only' for specific reasons, such as the language teachers. It seeks to create a category neither expected to engage in the independent pursuit of knowledge nor given scope to do so without permission. Statute C,1,4 would be changed to redefine University Teaching Officers so as to remove the right to sabbatical leave, in the expectation that some would not need it in order to have adequate time for research. For them, 'Stint models are expected to include time for scholarship and other forms of contribution'.

Cambridge's established academic posts are called University Teaching Offices but that has not meant that they may be treated as teaching-only without major change. Statute C, I, 4, taking its key wording from the Oxford and Cambridge Act 1877 s. 15, defines their duties:

*'It shall be the duty of all holders of University offices entitled to leave under a Special Ordinance made under Statute C I 1(a) to devote themselves to the advancement of knowledge in their subject, to give instruction therein to students, to undertake from time to time such examining of students as may be required by the Board, Syndicate, or other body which is chiefly concerned with their duties, and to promote the interests of the University as a place of education, religion, learning, and research.'*

The academic career structure in the University has therefore been based on University offices with duties including both teaching and research, and on the longstanding principle that the delivery of outstanding teaching is dependent on academic staff who are active in research or scholarship, the 'advancement of knowledge'.<sup>10</sup> They have traditionally involved a duty to carry out both teaching and research, with it left largely to the 'officer' to determine the balance of those activities, subject to a requirement to give a modest number of lectures a year.

In the new *Report* a definition of 'scholarship' is provided. Teaching-only staff will be expected to 'deliver research-informed teaching and thus to engage in scholarship', so this seems to amount to keeping up with reading but not contributing to the academic literature. Their opportunity for 'advancement of knowledge' will be limited. Teaching-only academic staff will not be returnable for the REF, with possible exceptions determined on a case-by-case basis by Unit of Assessment Committees. Sabbatical time would become discretionary for Cambridge teaching-only staff:

*'Academic (teaching and scholarship) staff will not be granted an automatic right to sabbatical leave to conduct research and scholarship, but they may be eligible—in exceptional circumstances and for very specific purposes—to apply for relief from teaching to undertake a significant body of work, in line with principles agreed at School level.'*<sup>11</sup>

The new teaching-only staff would merely 'be expected to deliver research-informed teaching' which may include research 'which may be pedagogic in nature or related to relevant professional practice'. It is 'recognised' that 'some may also be engaging in scholarship' but it will be 'in their own time, if outside the core expectations of their role.' Any scholarly outputs of academic (teaching-and-scholarship) staff will be recognised as appropriate to their roles, through the promotion and reward schemes of their designated career pathway.

Also recognisable from what has been happening elsewhere among UK universities is the proposal to 'give existing staff the opportunity to transfer to the new [teaching-only] category' where this is the best fit, including being 'in the best interests of the individual and their career development'. In Cambridge too teaching-only staff would not be able to move across into a teaching-and-research role however REF-worthy their research may prove to be. Academic teaching-and-research staff in other Russell-Group universities will recognise this sort of framework in the offers made to them to persuade them to become 'teaching-only' or face redundancy. They will also recognise the notion of 'pedagogic research' as involving research in 'pedagogy' rather than in the subject taught. (I have seen the documentation on this point sent to affected staff by more than one of these universities.)

\* \* \*

## Why is this happening?

One must wonder what is driving this in Cambridge, given the relatively small number of staff affected. The drivers of the proposals are acknowledged to include the fact that it would improve the appearance of the gender balance:

*'Another impetus for change is the University's commitment to tackle the gender pay gap. The majority of the [250] teaching focused staff identified by the Working Group are women, and the proportions of women increase considerably at the lowest grades (6 and 7).'*

The *Joint Report of the Council and the General Board on the titles and structure of academic offices*, published on 18 March 2020,<sup>12</sup> fell into the black hole of Cambridge's suspension of governance (including regular publication of the *Reporter*) until it was 'discussed' by email in June. In response to that Discussion the Council published a Notice in the jumbo catch-up issue of the *Reporter* on 29 July, including the statement that 'the impact of the new titles structure on under-represented groups should be monitored to help ensure that the University's recruitment and progression policies and practices are aligned with its commitments to equality, diversity and inclusion'. The *Reporter* of 29 July submitted 30 Graces which were duly approved without challenge, which was less than surprising so far beyond the end of the Easter Term and during the continuing limitations of the suspension of governance.

It is to be hoped that the reappearance of the proposal on teaching-only posts will now attract a better-coordinated response and one with less room for the emergence of unintended consequences. Those are still coming to light, with an addition bolted to this *Report* to deal with one of them.<sup>13</sup> It would be a matter of concern if the abandonment of the fundamental expectation that Cambridge's academic staff are to be busy with the advancement of knowledge included any element of positive discrimination to that end.

<sup>1</sup> For example <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-04-26/debates/E7B4AA28-C269-4AE7-959C-C0B321871036/HigherEducationAndResearchBill>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/axed-staff-submissions-leaves-bad-taste-ref-deadline-passes>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2013-14/weekly/6355/section7.shtml#heading2-47>

<sup>4</sup> [dmin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2014-15/weekly/6361/section10.shtml#heading2-21](https://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2014-15/weekly/6361/section10.shtml#heading2-21)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2017-18/weekly/6511/section1.shtml#heading2-6>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.staff.admin.cam.ac.uk/general-news/new-academic-promotions-scheme-in-development>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.staff.admin.cam.ac.uk/general-news/new-academic-promotions-scheme-in-development>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.staff.admin.cam.ac.uk/general-news/new-academic-promotions-scheme-in-development>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2020-21/weekly/6612/6612.pdf#page=135>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2013-14/weekly/6355/section7.shtml#heading2-47>

<sup>11</sup> Cambridge Schools are the counterpart of Oxford Divisions.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2019-20/weekly/6582/section5.shtml#heading2-12>

<sup>13</sup> 'The opportunity is being taken to propose an amendment to Statute C XII, as approved by Grace 5 of 29 July 2020 to implement a new academic office structure but still subject to approval by Her Majesty in Council. The change is to insert the word 'University' in the titles of the new academic offices of Associate Professor (Grade 10), Associate Professor (Grade 9) and Assistant Professor, to ensure that they can be distinguished from similarly titled unestablished roles held by academic staff under both the teaching and scholarship and the research and teaching strands.'

# The City of Oxford and the Pandemic of 2020/21

DANNY DORLING

WITHIN the boundaries of the city of Oxford, for all of 2020, only 95 deaths were registered with COVID-19 being mentioned on the death certificate. It is possible that very early on in the pandemic a few Oxford residents will have died because of the disease, but that was not recognised at the time. However, a possibly similar and also small number of people probably did not die mainly due to the disease despite having it, and it being mentioned on their death certificate. These two sources of error in the official statistics tend to cancel each other out nationally.

Of the 95 residents of the city of Oxford who died directly because of the pandemic in 2020, 46 died in hospital, 30 in care homes, 10 at home and 3 in another communal establishment. In that same year 1,005 people died in total in the city; so 90.5% of the people who died in Oxford city in 2020 did not die because of the pandemic; but from another cause of death. That proportion, of just over nine out of ten deaths in Oxford, compares to 86.8% for England and Wales as a whole, so Oxford experienced a below average pandemic mortality rate in 2020, despite being so close to the epicentre of the pandemic in the UK, and the place which saw the worse rates of all: London. However, the second wave was worse for Oxford than the first.

For residents of the city of Oxford, more died directly due to the pandemic in the first 10 weeks of 2021 than in all of 2020. The number dying then was 102 people (in total) in those first ten weeks of 2021: 65 in hospital, 28 in care homes and 9 at home. As I write (on the last day of March 2021) that number has dropped to zero in week 11. In those first ten weeks of 2021 38.8% of all deaths of Oxford city residents involved COVID-19; this was now above the national proportion at that time which was 34.6%. Oxford suffered similarly to England and Wales overall; but only because wave 2 was worse than wave 1 for the city. Wave 2 ended far more abruptly than wave 1, due to vaccination.

If you had been working in a hospital in the city you may think these numbers look low; that was because more died within the city of Oxford, in its hospitals, who were resident elsewhere in the county of Oxfordshire or even further away – so their deaths are not recorded within the statistics for the city. And it may also be because so many people have been ill for each person who has died, some extremely ill. It is data on where most people within Oxford were ill at the height of wave 2 in January 2021 that tells us who was most affected in the city. At that point in time the cases, and hence the deaths, were hugely concen-

trated among people normally resident in the poorer parts of the city.

The UK Government dashboard produced a map of cases of the disease per 100,000 people living in each area. An inset of that map is shown here, a snapshot taken in January 2021 at the height of wave 2. At that time, three areas of Oxford reported known minimal rates of over 800 per 100,000. The real rates of infection will have been at least three or four times greater than that. The actual rates of disease will have been higher than those reported because only a minority of people ever come forward to be tested – those with bad symptoms or additional worries.

As the map shows the areas with the highest number of cases were centred on Barton, Donnington, and a large area stretching from Rose Hill to Greater Leys – all containing parts of the city which have been the poorest in recent decades, parts where overcrowding is highest and where most people have no choice but to work, and work at jobs which cannot be done at home (there is very little unemployment in Oxford). In contrast, in the wealthier enclaves of the city between Jericho and Summertown between 4 and 10+ times fewer people had the disease at this time; and here it was generally far easier to work from home, if not mandated to work at home by many of these peoples' employers.

Rates of infection with COVID-19 per 100,000 people in January 2021 in Oxford



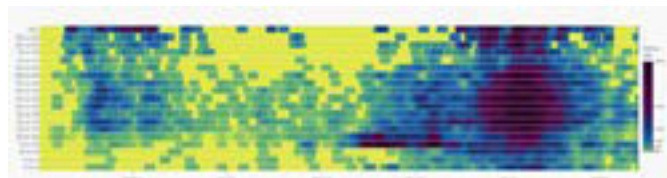
One question people may ask is whether there is any evidence that having a large group of students in residence at the two universities in Oxford had an influence. The heat

diagrams shown below are probably the best evidence we have to suggest they did not. So although there was a rise in cases among the student-aged population in October and November 2020 it did not spread into older groups then. Similarly in Cambridge; but the pattern for Milton Keynes, an urban centre of similar size and distance from London but without a large student population, is very different.

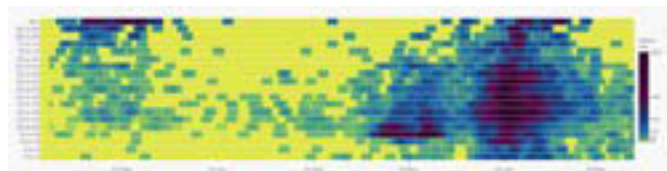
In Milton Keynes rates rose slowly in late September and October among young adults and that increase slowly spread to older and older groups in the population. When the new “Kent” variant arrived in December 2020, there was a sudden and accelerated increase. Much the same happened in Oxford and Cambridge at the very same time, but earlier—in late November and early December—there were very low cases in the two ancient university cities. Whatever risk students returning to the city in October may have brought with them had largely dissipated.

It looks as if there was very little connection between infections among students, which rose in the autumn and then fell in early winter, and cases among locals—which rose later. For once, the invisible but very real wall between town and gown may have been beneficial. It is a form of quarantine. If we were in any way a normal university town where more students lived at home with their parents, and far more lived out in the community, then the city of Oxford may have suffered a higher mortality rate. This is not a general argument for the benefits of cloistered, anachronistic and bizarre traditions and social divisions—merely an observation that very occasionally, as in autumn 2020, it is actually possible to point out a positive aspect to the caste/class system of this city.

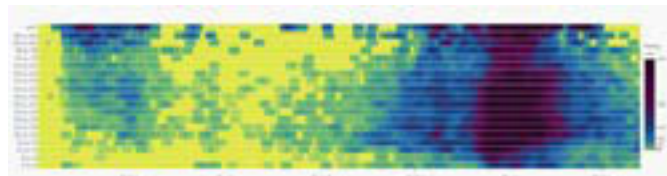
Oxford—cases per week by age group per 100,000 people



Cambridge—cases per week by age group per 100,000 people



Milton Keynes—cases per week by age group per 100,000 people



Source of data: Government dashboard <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/> and ONS Weekly provisional figures on deaths occurring and registered in England and Wales by Local Authority <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/causesofdeath/datasets/deathregistrationsandoccurrencesbylocalauthorityandhealthboard>

## From Louis XIV’s France to Xi Jinping’s Hong Kong - One Country, Two Systems in Historical Perspective

PETER CAREY

As the long shadow of China’s forcibly imposed National Security Law descended over Hong Kong last year (30 June 2020), and a new national security office was officially opened in Hong Kong placing mainland Chinese agents in the heart of the territory, the ‘one country two systems’ appeared to be dead in the water. First formulated by Deng Xiaoping, China’s paramount leader from 1978 to 1989, in his negotiations with the UK Government of Mrs Margaret Thatcher which led up to the 19 December 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration, this pragmatic principle underpinned the Hong Kong Basic Law of 1990 (effective 1 July 1997). This guaranteed that the former British colony would be allowed to enjoy the exercise of its common law legal system and legislative arrangements, human rights and freedoms of democratic expression, as a Special Administrative Region (SAR) for 50 years after the formal handover of the territory on 1 July 1997.

The appointment of Zheng Yangxiong, a hardliner chosen by Beijing to head up the newly opened security

office in June 2020, sent a clear message that criticism of China’s government will no longer be tolerated. At the same time, the law’s 66 clauses gives Beijing wide powers to arrest and prosecute those accused of jeopardizing China’s National Security via charges of subversion, secession, terrorism and collusion with foreign powers. These would allow for the extradition of suspects to mainland China and long prison sentences, and the vagueness of the way these crimes are defined is deeply concerning. As Professor Johnny Chan, a legal scholar at the University of Hong Kong, has pointed out ‘it is clear that the [new Security] law will have a severe impact on freedom of expression, if not personal security on the people of Hong Kong. Effectively they are imposing the People’s Republic of China’s criminal system onto the Hong Kong common law system, leaving them with complete discretion to decide who should fall into which system.’

‘No Hong Konger is under any illusion that Beijing has any intention to respect our basic rights and honour its [previous] promises to us [under the Hong Kong



Basic Law], so I bade my city farewell!', stated the now London-exiled Nathan Law, the former chairman of the Demosistō Party (in office 2016-18), founded during the 2014 pro-democracy Umbrella Movement. On 1 April 2021, Chan and Law's warnings became a reality with the conviction of Hong Kong media tycoon, Jimmy Lai, along with veteran politician, Martin Lee, and five other Hong Kong pro-democracy activists, on charges of organizing and participating in pro-democracy rallies in the former British colony in 2019.

China's decision to implement the National Security Law in this unilateral fashion comes against the backdrop of the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic, which originated in Wuhan in the closing months of 2019, becoming a truly global in the first three weeks of January 2020 due in large part to Beijing's belated closure (23 January 2020) of this internationally connected city. The same period also witnessed an acceleration in the trade war with China initiated by the Trump administration (2017-21), which has now morphed into a new Cold War between Washington and Beijing. This is in large part due to a fundamental miscalculation on China's part that it could compete with the US as a global power rather than cooperate with it as an economic partner. No one can dispute that China has taken 900 million people out of extreme poverty in the past 40 years, but at the same time, there are still hundreds of millions in terrible living conditions, and tremendous social problems across the entire country, not least separatism and yearnings for personal freedom. China cannot buy off its people for ever with enrichment without the ability to speak freely. It has never been done before in human history, and there is no reason why the Chinese totalitarian tech state will be able to change natural human desires to voice their opinion. Premier Xi Jinping has done China a terrible disservice in retreating from the hesitant, slow, but real steps that were being taken towards democratization prior to his ascension to power in 2012.

China's recent unilateral imposition of the National Security Law has also put an end to Hong Kong's special trade and tariff status which it had hitherto enjoyed with the US, and put a question mark on the future of 1,300 US firms with operations and offices in Hong Kong. It has also made senior Chinese officials, including the recently appointed Hong Kong Security Tsar, Zheng Yangxiong, targets for sanctions under the 2016 Global Magnitsky Act. This authorizes the US Government to sanction human rights offenders by freezing their assets worldwide and banning them from entering the US. Hitherto applied to senior Communist Party officials and the Xinjiang Public Security Bureau for human rights abuses against the Uighur Muslims, one million of whom now languish in 're-education (read: concentration)' camps, this will now (14 July) – under the recently signed Presidential Executive Order and Hong Kong Autonomy Act – be extended to all those involved in the security crackdown in Hong Kong.

Competition with America will not be good for China. There is a vengeful quality in the US political psyche, which, once aroused, will be hard to extinguish. One recalls here the American response to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour (6/7 December 1941), and its architect, Japanese Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto's (1884-1943), admission that: 'I fear all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve!' Both the US and Europe are now 're-shoring' much of their manufacturing or else moving it to places like Vietnam and Indone-

sia (for example, Brebes industrial park on the north coast of Java), which are more than happy to take China's business, at the same time as the US Federal Reserve is buying back Chinese-owned Treasury bonds. Meanwhile, China's one child policy means that it faces an economic train wreck as one child has to support two parents and maybe also uncles and aunts or even grandparents, and they have recently tipped over into a stage where the working age population is reducing and the ageing population increasing. China has not embraced mass immigration, and it does not have the cultural narrative to allow that, unlike the English-speaking world, especially America. This means that America's population will keep growing, and even in this age of automation, this will remain one of the major drivers of economic growth.

\* \* \*

So how does Hong Kong fit into this picture? One major asset which the island-city has are its highly educated, innovative and financially savvy population. Britain, as the former colonial power has granted 350,000 Hong Kongers British National Overseas (BNO) passports who were born before the 1997 handover. These give holders the rights to automatic six-month visitor visas. An estimated three million more Hong Kong citizens and their dependents, or just under half Hong Kong's current 7.5 million people, could apply for such passports, which the UK government has now announced will carry substantially enlarged rights – namely leave to remain and work in the UK for up to five years with the right to apply for citizenship at the end of that period after a year-long settled status period.

This changes the picture substantially for BNO passport holders in Hong Kong. It also holds out the prospect that one way forward for them might be to emigrate. And China has cried foul, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Zhao Lijian, has stated that Britain will bear the consequences for renegeing on its promise made before Hong Kong's 1 July 1997 handover not to grant BNO passport holders the right of abode in Britain. What those 'consequences' might be have already been prefigured in the massive state-sponsored cyber-attack on Australian government organisations, industry, political parties, education, health, and essential service providers. These attacks were clearly state-sponsored, with China top of the suspect list: in the words of the Australian Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, 'we know it is a sophisticated, state-sponsored actor because of the scale and nature of the targeting, and the tradecraft used'.

Whether China makes good on such threats may well depend on the scale of the exodus from Hong Kong. In the six years between 1988 and 1994, in the run-up to the 1 July 1997 handover, some 55,000 Hong Kong residents left the island city each year with a total of between 250,000 and one million (out of a then population of six million in 1994) departing the territory. A substantial proportion of these are likely to have been expatriates with UK citizens looming large. Moreover, a sizeable proportion of these returned after the handover when fears first expressed about what a Chinese takeover might mean failed to materialise. The situation is now very different. In late January 2021, the British Government estimated that 300,000 BNO passport holders from Hong Kong – roughly a tenth of the total number eligible – would take up the UK

citizenship offer, netting the British economy 2.9 billion pounds sterling over the course of the coming five years in inward investment and wealth creation.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that Hong Kong is regularly ranked in the top five places in the world in terms of the OECD's Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) rating exercise<sup>2</sup> and has four of its top five universities in the best fifty tertiary institutions in the world according to the most recent (2021) QS global university rankings, is important here. It means that Britain can be confident that those Hong Kong residents it admits as citizens under its UK citizenship scheme are likely to have the requisite technological skills and all-round educational experience to make a real contribution to the creative economy. Indeed, in many respects the intellectual formation of these immigrants will likely be superior to their British-born peers, the UK being placed joint thirteenth with Slovenia in the most recent (2018) PISA assessment.

Half a century ago, Britain's decision to admit 27,000 Ugandan Asians through its Uganda Resettlement Board following President Idi Amin's 1972 expulsion of three quarters of the 80,000-strong Ugandan Asian Community in that former East African colony, also brought the UK substantial benefits. Refugees from that period and their children have gone on to make their mark on British public life. One thinks here of the current Home Secretary, Priti Patel (born Croydon 1972; in office, 2019 to present), the journalist-author, Yasmin Alibhai-Brown (born Kampala 1949), the current Chair of Prudential Plc, Baroness Vadera (born to Gujarati tea-planter parents in Kakonde in southern Uganda, 1962), and—although not of Asian descent but still a political refugee—the recent Archbishop of York (2005–20) and now life peer, Lord John Sentamu (born Kampala 1949).

\* \* \*

Looking still further back in British history there is an even more interesting historical precedent which holds a mirror to current events in Hong Kong. This takes us to the late 17th century, when a similarly bold and pragmatic experiment, equivalent to Deng Xiaoping's 'one country, two systems', was brought to an end by an Absolutist state just across the English Channel. This event, which took place in October 1685, was the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1598). The Edict had guaranteed the political rights and religious liberties of the 800,000 French Calvinists (roughly five percent of France's 18 million strong population), known as Huguenots, for nearly a century. It had been initiated by one of France's greatest monarchs, Henry IV of Navarre (r. 1589–1610), a Protestant who had converted to Catholicism in order to unify France.

King Henry's 'one country, two systems' initiative with regard to France's Protestant and Catholic communities was bold and unique in its day. Since the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, the rulers of the German states had agreed to accept the principle '*cuius regio, eius religio* [whose realm, his religion]'. This meant that the inhabitants of a given state were required to follow the religion of the ruler of that state, which then became the state religion and that of all its inhabitants. Those who could not conform to their prince's religion were allowed to leave with their belongings and seek refuge in a state more congenial to their religious persuasions. This was an innovative idea in the sixteenth century, when orthodox Catholic teaching held

that Catholic monarchs should obey the pope, thus ensuring greater fruits of cooperation, less political infighting and fewer church divisions.

Henry's Edict of Nantes effectively ended the Wars of Religion by guaranteeing the physical protection of French Protestants via the designation of military strongholds (*places de sûreté Protestantes*) secured by Protestant garrisons—Montauban, Nîmes, La Rochelle and Saumur—in addition to some 150 emergency forts (*place de refuge*), sometimes just fortified manor houses, maintained at the Huguenots own expense. The Edict also ensured that, when French Protestants travelled abroad they would be guaranteed protection from the Inquisition, a guarantee which Pope Clement VIII (in office, 1592–1605) strongly protested—'this crucifies me!' were his supposed words.

In the context of late 16th and early 17th-century Europe, these were bold measures indeed and they met with fierce resistance from hard-line Catholics: Henry IV survived fourteen assassination attempts before eventually succumbing to an assassin's dagger in 1610. After his untimely death, the late king was celebrated in French popular literature in the song, '*Vive le Roi Henri*' (later the anthem for the French monarchy), and in Voltaire's '*Henriade*' (1723), an epic poem written in honour of the his life by one of the greatest enlightenment philosophers of his age. He was also one of only two French monarchs (the other was St Louis—Louis IX [r.1226–70])—the saintly 13th-century ruler) whose body was treated with respect when the French Revolutionaries desecrated the tombs of the French kings in the Basilica of St Denis in northern Paris in August–October 1793.

When the 'Sun King', Louis XIV (r. 1643–1715), abrogated Henry IV's edict in the name of religious uniformity, he resorted to military force—the so-called *dragonnades* or forced billeting of cavalymen (dragoons) on Huguenot households—to pressure the Protestant communities into either converting to Catholicism or going into exile. An estimated 200,000 migrants—about a quarter of the pre-1685 Protestant/Huguenot population of France—were forced into a global diaspora. Some 60,000 of these ended up in the British Isles (50,000 in England, and a further 10,000 in Ireland), where their highly marketable skills in silk-weaving (origin of the Spitalfields silk industry in London), banking, commerce, textile manufacture, the book trade, the arts, teaching, military service, and the stage, were in high demand. A further 60,000 settled in the Netherlands, where their skills were similarly appreciated. Indeed, 400 French Huguenot families with knowledge of viticulture were sent out by the Dutch East India Company to South Africa to develop the local wine industry—the Indonesian freedom fighter and holy war leader, Prince Diponegoro (1785–1855), later being a direct beneficiary of this expertise when fine Cape wines, like his favourite vintage dessert wine from Groot Constantia vineyard in the Western Cape, began to be exported to Java in the late 18th century.

Within fifty years of their arrival, the Huguenots had become almost totally assimilated into the British population, and their presence was actively encouraged in the context of the post-1688—namely, the landing of the Protestant Dutch King, William of Orange (r.1689–1702), in England—succession of wars and ideological conflict with Catholic France. France's loss was Britain's undoubted gain in terms of the accession of highly skilled migrants

who contributed directly to the building of Britain's industrial and commercial economy in the 18th century when the island nation became—for a brief period (1780-1830)—the leading global trading power.

Obviously, early 21st century Hong Kong is not late 17th century France, and Hong Kongers, despite their undoubted skills, are a different community from the French Huguenots. More importantly, the story which 18th century Britain had to tell about itself was infinitely more dynamic and interesting than that on offer in its current post-Brexit incarnation. But in one undoubted respect there are parallels and these can be found in the interest and eagerness with which countries the world over

from Taiwan to Australia, Canada, Japan and the US have expressed in receiving Hong Kong citizens as migrants. Only time will tell whether, like Louis XIV, Premier Xi Jinping's recent version of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes with regard to Hong Kong will become a classic 'own goal'.

<sup>1</sup> Yew Lun Tian and William James, "UK offers HK Residents route to citizenship angering China", *Reuters.com*, 29 January 2021.

<sup>2</sup> In 2018, the PISA rankings were based on an assessment of half a million 15-year-olds in some 77 countries on the basis of Science, Reading and Mathematical 'literacy'. OECD=Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (Paris).

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## A Note from New York

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MARY ANN CAWS

AMAZINGLY in New York, we can now go to museums, so I spend what seems lots of time at the Met Museum, the entrance into which is now greatly abbreviated: you simply show your card at the entrance to the elevators if you enter on the ground floor or to the exhibit rooms if on the main floor. What better place to meet friends who want to read you their latest poem than a bench in one of the Impressionist rooms?

Yesterday I had, if you can believe it, the few Ingres works and then the whole room of Degas to myself! For the first time, I could actually see the scratch marks and the space between brushstrokes, and I have frequented (if that's the word) the Met for over fifty years....

And now the Met Brueur is welcoming the Frick's collection or some of it, while the Frick is under reconstruction. I remember the Whitney there before, and lament

nothing: the building survives with Calder's Circus still atop the stairs.

Everything everywhere in the galleries: Jane Freilicher at one part of the Kasmin and the magnificent Lee Krasner Collages in the other, some of which are so astonishing you feel you have never seen them previously. Hirsch and Adler had a grand bunch of odd paintings by Angela Fraleigh, recalling various Mannerist and Baroque paintings of reclining females.

On another level of culture, many many restaurants have shuttered and will not reopen, so expensive were the costs of heating the outside spaces and of having only 25 per cent occupancy inside.

But when I hear of Parisians having to forsake outdoor drinking and dining at six pm, I feel New York is grandly gifted to have what we have!

The editors invite and welcome contributions from all our readers.  
The content of Oxford Magazine relies largely on what arrives spontaneously on the editors' desk and is usually published as received.

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## A meditation on my Christian name

(*Dorothy*: from Greek Δωροθέα, 'gift of God')

All our lives we carry these  
names, gifts from our parents.  
Showering or in bed

I wear mine, like a soldier  
his dog tags, a pilgrim  
her St Christopher medal

but I daren't look my old gift  
horse in the mouth, for fear  
of what the Greeks who bore it

nested within it: another gift  
and the god who bestows it.  
I carry my name as a man might

give a piggyback to a child  
who grows ever heavier  
as they cross a swift river

until he dreads he holds  
the one who holds the world.  
It's Christmas, and my name

is on boxes under the tree.  
I make a wish to leave it there  
this once, to climb naked

on the back of a strong horse,  
ride out into the rapids  
and let them carry me away.

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## 'Magic!'

It's become second nature  
to co-opt the supernatural  
for ordinary praise or thanks

as if these pints are rabbits  
the barman pulled from a hat,  
that meal you cooked just

the card I was thinking of,  
this poem conjured  
from a puff of smoke.

Or might 'magic' invoke  
not trickery but a blessing?  
Illusionism has nothing

to offer one who seeks  
an amulet against harm.  
Let the word not dispel

but expand mysteries,  
the way my scientist father  
once, defending the Bible

against a sceptical priest,  
argued quantum physics  
allows for miracles.

So when I say you charm  
soup from a stone, music  
from maple and nylon,

I consent to an enchantment  
by whatever power moves us  
to beguile or to protect.

DOROTHY LAWRENSON

Dorothy Lawrenson is originally from Dundee and now lives in Edinburgh. Her poems, in English and Scots, have appeared in journals including *Edinburgh Review*, *Frogmore Papers*, *Irish Pages*, *ISLE*, *Lallans*, *South*, and *Painted, spoken*; and in the anthologies *A Year of Scottish Poems*, *Be the First to Like This*, and the forthcoming *Best New British and Irish Poets 2019–2021*. She can be found online at [www.dorothylawrenson.com](http://www.dorothylawrenson.com).

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## My mother asks me to knit her a hat

Before the Skype call ends I've armed myself  
with a quiver of needles, ordered fuchsia wool.  
'...but not one of those *pussy hats*.' I minimise  
that easy pattern, opt instead for 'The Aviator'.  
On a sweltering porch five thousand miles from her,  
what can I do but craft a complicated hat? Once,  
I joked that a lost letter 'did an Amelia Earhart',  
like in Kinky Friedman's song about her last flight.  
Remember when Kinky ran for governor? Damn –

this pilot has an ear on top of her head. Concentrate.  
I unravel my work. Yet that is work too. *Emotional labour*.  
If unknitting could reverse hair loss, I'd specialise in it.  
Doing what shouldn't be needed, millions of women  
have caused a shortage of pink yarn. I knit and unknit  
all through the hot night, send 'The Aviator' by airmail  
with a note telling how I got my money's worth  
from the rare wool, making the same hat seven times,  
like some enchanted garment from a fairy tale.



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# Furious Interiors: ghosts, gifts and the madwoman in the attic

Ghosts live in rooms, whether in houses or in the head too. Ghosts live in words and in silences lying just behind the words. Ghosts live in books, in the lines on the page, in the spaces, the margins, the spine, the stitching, in the pause and the dash and the question mark. And of course, ghosts live most of all in every full stop.

It's a warm, sunny day, as warm as you get in the hills in the West. Not a breath of wind. Nothing stirring at all. In the stone sitting room of a medieval house, Perth y Felin is its name, I am sweeping the hearth. The hearth is an inglenook fireplace you can walk right into. Nine feet wide by five feet high by four feet deep. Flagstones. A bread oven set into the wall behind, on the left. Old metal hooks where the animals hung after slaughter to be smoked. A cranking machine that turned over the pig when it went to be roasted. I bend forward with a dustpan and brush in my hand to clear up some ash from a log that's fallen the previous evening. Even in summer you need a fire there as the nights draw down. The walls are rock and three feet thick. The chimney is open at the top to the sky. I have sometimes thought a star might fall down and land in the fireplace.

I am sweeping, it is ordinary, the sun is out. I can see through the window benign-looking fields and a few sheep grazing. As I bend forward something icy descends on the back of my neck. I don't know what's happening and stop, stock still. I can feel my hair beginning to lift away from my scalp—standing on end—and my arms and my legs, every hair in its follicle. The chill is extreme and with it comes suddenly an absolute instinct that I must get away. I drop the dustpan and brush on the floor, race out of that fireplace, out of that room, away from the icy fingering that has suddenly touched me, into the sun and the day and the life. Normality. The real world. Everything in an instant gone back to how it should be.

But not quite. Not ever. For the rest of the day I go about my business as usual. Except, I do not go near that corner of the fireplace. My partner steps in and brushes it up and makes a joke. He is nothing if not a practical man.

That evening I look up on the internet 'hair standing on end', 'cold on the back of the neck' and so on. I find I am one of many people who have experienced these phenomena. I find that this is the classic, staple, manifestation of an apparition. From that moment I understand that this ancient house I live in is haunted. Why should it not be? Five hundred years of lives and deaths there. From that moment onwards I know for certain there are ghosts.

There are no attics at Perth y Felin for the bedrooms are tucked up under the roof in what would have been once the store place for grain. There's been a house there—or a dwelling at least—since thirteen hundred. The oldest room, whose wall is a higgledy-piggledy mess of rock and infill is from fifteen hundred. Civilization, you might say, or at least the beginnings of a certain affluence, date from the sitting room at sixteen forty. Then pieces were added, this room, that room. The roof, once sod, was slated—God knows when. Then more recently—in the nineteenth century? In the twentieth century? There's no one alive who knows that now—the lath and the battens and the purlins and the slates were raised on one side and dormers constructed. Light in the attics! Bedrooms. Modernity. Except when you're lying up under that roof, in the night, in the storms that come in from the West with intense regularity, you know that modernity is a paper-thin construct. You listen to the mice scuttering in the rafters just inches away from where you are resting. The bats in the eaves, shifting and scratching. The house creaks as the rocks in the walls ease then restabilize.

I have been in this house for thirty years. If thirty years is a generation then twenty generations of people have lived here. My father lived to be nearly a hundred so if we take his lifespan to be a measurement, this house has been occupied for just seven life spans. Someone said to me recently, with that calculation, there are only twenty people between me and Christ.

The attics, before they became bedrooms, were grain stores. For this place was a mill and as such was the heart of the local community. The grain in the attics, bulging and pungent. The water wheel turning. The flour being milled and ground and deposited there in its creamy dryness in wooden containers. The smell of baked bread. When we pulled down the ceiling and put in a new one thirty years ago the grain fell in clusters. Veritable little snowstorms of grain from this corner, that crevice. I picked it up in dry little handfuls and let the chaff fall through my open fingers. Now it still falls but singly, occasionally. In what year did they harvest that singular grain? Under what mode of thresher did the sheaf fall? I put out my hand to catch a grain as it falls through the sunlight. If ghosts had voices I would ask these questions of the ghost that lives here, for she must know this, she must know everything.

Sometimes I half expect the grain to be snatched away by an unseen hand as I reach towards it. That hasn't happened yet. There's silence and the merest flit of something as the light changes. Somewhere away at the end of the house a door clicks to and fro on its hinges. This is what time is. The door on the hinge that you can never go through. The promise of something that will never, ever be fulfilled.

CLARE MORGAN

Clare Morgan is a novelist and short story writer, and founder and director of Oxford University's Master of Studies in Creative Writing. Her recent research on poetry and business was featured in the *Wall Street Journal* and *FastCompany*, and is forthcoming in *Humanizing Business* (Springer, 2021).

## NOTICE

Jane Griffiths, literary editor of the *Oxford Magazine*, will be pleased to read literary submissions of any description—e.g. verse, critical prose, very short stories, segments of dialogue, reviews of new dramatic productions and books, etc. Submissions should be no longer than 750 words, and where possible should be sent by email attachment to [jane.griffiths@ell.ox.ac.uk](mailto:jane.griffiths@ell.ox.ac.uk) together with a two-sentence biog.

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# Sunningwell School of Art

## – a very brief history

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ALLYSON AUSTIN

THE philosopher Roger Bacon, the painters J.M.W. Turner, John Piper, George, Annie, Richard and Hilda Carline and Dr. Leonard McComb RA, the politician Airey Neave, and a thriving centre for the study of the Fine Arts and Pottery all have in common the small Oxfordshire village of Sunningwell.

‘Sunnigwellan or Sunningauuille’ meaning ‘the spring of Sunna’s People’, was first recorded in 821 and is located 3 ½ miles south of Oxford, and just over 2 miles north of Abingdon. The source of the spring is not known but it emerges at what is now the village pond. Sitting opposite the pond is the focal point of the village, the charming church of St Leonard. The church was built some time in the 13th century (it is first mentioned in 1246) and the tower is said to have acted as laboratory for the astronomical experiments of the medieval genius, Fellow of Merton, Friar Bacon. As with many churches it has been added to over the centuries. The church has an Elizabethan polygonal west porch believed to have been gifted by John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury, who had been rector of St Leonard’s in about 1551. J.P. Seddon, associate of the Pre-Raphaelites and friend of William Morris, directed a restoration of the church in 1877 and designed the stained glass in the east window.

J.W.M. Turner’s relationship with the Thames is well documented and he lived on or near the Thames for most of his life. He was born in Covent Garden in 1775, went to school in Brentford and made some of his first sketches whilst visiting his aunt and uncle (Joseph and Mary Marshall) who lived up-river at Sunningwell in a cottage adjacent to the pond. He made a number of sketches (now available on-line from the Tate) of St Leonard’s in 1789, when Turner was just 14 years old. Clearly visible in the sketches is the polygonal west porch, the same viewpoint was adopted centuries later by John Piper (1903-1992) in his photographs and screen-prints of the church (1985). Turner’s last known sketches of Sunningwell (possibly drawn from Boars Hill) were made in 1821/22 when Turner was in his 40’s.



St Leonard’s Church, Sunningwell.  
Image: Nash Ford Publishing

Buried in the churchyard at St Leonard’s are members of the Carline Family, many of them also artists. George and Annie Carline were both painters, as were three of their children, Sydney, Richard and Hilda. Richard became a close friend of the Cookham artist Stanley Spencer, whom Hilda married in 1925. Richard is interred in the Carline family grave. Audrey Blackman, the sculptor, is also buried in the churchyard.

Opposite the church, and nestled around the pond, is the Victorian building that was once the village school. In the early 1970’s the school became vacant and an opportunity was taken by two painters to set up an independent artist-led art school for education in the Fine Arts and pottery. The Canadian painter Duncan Killen and the



Sunningwell Village Pond, The Old School House and  
Sunningwell School of Art  
Image: Des Blenkinsopp

Glasgow-born artist Leonard McComb (later RA) began teaching classes at Sunningwell School of Art in 1973. The school’s numbers grew, and by the late 1970’s over 100 students were receiving instruction from professional artists. The school’s future was in jeopardy as the Education Department wanted to dispose of the Victorian building and it was destined for the open market which meant closure for the School. The MP for Wallingford at the time, Airey Neave, in partnership with the philanthropic Chief Executive of Blackwell Scientific Publications, Per Saugman, managed to secure the building for the community and the Art School could continue. In March 1979, just days after the final negotiations, Airey Neave was assassinated by the INLA with a car bomb, detonated in the car park at the Palace of Westminster.

Sunningwell School of Art is now almost 50 years old and has over 400 students receiving instruction from 30

professional practicing artists. It is described as ‘a great success story of today’s village’ by Robert Evans (Emeritus Professor of History, Oriel College) in his book *Tales from God’s Acre*.<sup>2</sup> The building has not changed since its school days and still has high ceilings and a large open fireplace in the main hall. Sunningwell School of Art offers classes for all ages from 5 to 95 and its doors are open well into the evening to accommodate everyone.

The scene nestled around the pond in Sunningwell, where Sunna’s spring emerges opposite the church, has

changed very little over the years. Art students can still be seen drawing in the churchyard in spring and summer, ducks and herons still arrive on the pond each year and the church remains the centre of the community. The view can be summed up in a quote from the Canadian painter Duncan Killen, co-founder of the School: *‘It takes the English a long time to decide to build something, but when they do, it lasts for hundreds of years.’*

## REVIEWS

### A Question for Our Time

*Angled by the Flood: Poems about the Sea*  
Edited by Elsa Hammond, SciPo, Spring 2021.



*Angled by the Flood: Poems about the Sea*\* is the third SciPo anthology in a trilogy that celebrates the creative common ground between poetry and science (others in the trilogy are *A Hatchery of Shadows* and *Haunted by Cycles of Return*).

This book focuses on the science of the sea. The winning poets celebrate this intersection in unexpected, creative and innovative ways. The poems explore all elements of the sea from mythical tales, personal recollections, to its beauty, power and destructive force. Underlying all of the poems is a common anxiety about the Anthropocene making this a timely and urgent piece of work building beautifully on the extensive range of sea and ocean themed poetry that has gone before it.

The opening poem by Margot Myers *Amulet* reminds us of the beauty and complexity of our interlinked oceanic environment, a simple walk on the beach appreciating common features such as, ‘the lug worms soft sand coils’, ends with a meditation on a plain stone and remembers its beauty and extraordinary value:

*but you held its hard comfort  
in your palm,  
licked the salty surface,  
and briefly, it shone.*

Eveline Pye tells the story of the Japanese sea-farmers harvesting red seaweed for sushi and how their crops failed after the war, only to be revived by a scientist in Wales. Dr Drew and her experiments with laver in Wales and their subsequent use in Japan (by way of *Nature Magazine*) are the perfect example of ‘the pollination of

pure science’ and another example of the fine international eco system of the sea and all who study it. In *Mother of the Sea* (imo Kathleen Mary Drew-Baker 1901-1957):

*Each year at cherry blossom time,  
a crowd gathers on a windy hilltop  
by the Ariake Sea:  
Dr Drew’s academic gown  
is draped over her Shinto shrine;  
[...]  
with offerings  
of fish for the Mother of the Sea*

The power and destruction of the sea is skilfully encapsulated in Lucy Bergh’s poem *Ex-Lovers*, in which we hear the ex-lover at the door tapping, ragging, battering and then finally:

*He takes everything.  
I am left gasping for breath as the ocean steals  
my home.*

And we also hear further tales of human attempts to conquer the sea or at least live in partnership with it. In Elsa Hammond’s *Telling Time at Sea*, we discover how a rower attempting to row 2,400 miles across the Pacific Ocean as a solo venture is so attuned to the ocean and the elements that they start to use time in a different way and are naturally in rhythm with the day:

*You know without the need to check  
[...]  
The angle of your neck  
toward the sun can tell you that –  
the quality of light.*

Time is also a theme of Dorothy Yamamoto’s finely crafted poem, *Nautilus*:

*nautilus recorded earth time  
with the accretions in their chambers,  
turning lunar months into days.  
Now let those shells be  
memorials to the drowned, the lost,*

The lapping cadence of the tercets at the start of the poem comes to a halt in the sixth

stanza as she reflects on those that ‘found only water’ and we end with a memorial.

The book is beautifully concluded with Susan Wigmore’s *Cave Notes from Los Jameos del Agua*; here we are transported to the north-eastern part of Lanzarote, and told about the ‘natural wonder’ of caverns and partially collapsed volcanic tubes. We are taken through the creation:

*...slow pahoehoe lava  
flowing below its cooling surface*

[...]

*boring blindly to the edge of things  
earth’s bruit energy  
penetrating the sea*

Now a popular tourist spot we hear how:

*in the lake of squat lobsters, tourist coins  
leeching copper or haloed offerings  
the tunnel’s mouth plundered  
to preserve the souls of the living*

A fitting conclusion to a collection that wrangles with our co-existence with the sea, our need to survive at odds with the damage we are continually doing to our oceans and water networks: a question for our time and one well asked here. These poets have captured the sea’s beauty and power for generations to come, and also helped keep it in the spotlight where it belongs.

\*The anthology includes winning and commended poems from both the 2020 SciPo poetry competition about science and the sea, as well as submitted poems from under-18 poets, and contributions from the organisers of SciPo. SciPo is supported by The Oxford Research Centre for the Humanities (TORCH) and St Hilda’s College, Oxford.

Copies can be purchased from [www.elsahammond.com/books](http://www.elsahammond.com/books), or by emailing [elsa.hammond@st-hildas.ox.ac.uk](mailto:elsa.hammond@st-hildas.ox.ac.uk).

JANE THOMAS

## Bodleian lockout

Sir—The management of the Bodleian Libraries cannot be faulted for doing its best to maintain a library service during the Covid-19 crisis. However, in January 2021 a decision was taken to limit entry to persons able to book a seat through SSO. That does not accord well with the famous Latin welcome to scholars at the entrance to the Proscholium or with the motto imported into the New Bodleian when it was rebuilt as the Weston Library. ‘*Si bonus es intres, si nequam ne quaquam*’. This decision excludes the vast majority of the Libraries’ potential Readers, who are still invited to apply for a Card, although it will not let them in.

There is, of course, a case for ensuring that current students and academic staff can get into one of the libraries in times when there is a reduced number of seats, but was it necessary to bar everyone else? That question is sharpened by the figures given in the *University Bulletin* (‘University Roadmap’) of 12th April. From 7 April, with all libraries open, there will be 2250 daily bookable seats, which is an ‘uplift’ of 850 per day. Demand from Readers without SSO, including former members of Congregation, cannot even be assessed when only those possessed of SSO can express it. Yet we are told that so-called ‘external readers’ will not be admitted ‘until the end of the TT’, except to Special Collections in the Weston. Other research needing the libraries will thus remain impossible from January until at least July 2021.

Locking out of the Bodleian Libraries not only the world’s scholar-researchers but also the University’s own graduates seems a decision of some significance. If this can happen once it can happen again and the custom that Oxford’s matriculated members may use the Libraries all their lives will no longer be trustworthy. This unprecedented decision was taken under Crisis Management governance, I understand by the Silver Group. But on what constitutional authority and on what principles? May we be told?

Yours sincerely  
G.R. EVANS  
Oxford

# TO THE EDITOR

## Were you born between October 1954 and September 1955?

Sir—If you are a University employee born in this year and subject to the EJRA, the current formula puts your retirement date as September 30, 2023. I recently received a letter from my head of division confirming this:

*“I must make you aware that this letter serves as formal notification that your employment under your current contract will cease on your retirement date, 30 September 2023.”*

Did you know that, since at least 2016, the University’s stated expectation has been to add a year to the formula? Here is some of the text from the 2016 EJRA Review available online at <https://staff.admin.ox.ac.uk/working-at-oxford/ejra>:

*“In summary, the Group recommends that... the age for the EJRA be raised to 68 (with a recommendation that it is raised by a further year to 69 following the ten-year review in 2021, in line with anticipated increases in longevity of two years per decade); that the procedure be revised to better support all those involved; and that all these changes come into effect as soon as is practicable.”*

This summary is based on the following recommendation:

*“Recommendation 7. The Group... further recommends that the age of the EJRA be raised by another year to 69 in 2022, to mirror changes in longevity, provided that the ten-year data confirms the trends observed in this interim review.”*

Well, here we are in 2021. It would seem that a review should be underway that should lead next year to our retirement date being adjusted from 2023 to 2024. I would have expected a good deal of discussion about this, since many others, like me, need

to know their retirement dates in order to make plans for their futures. But I haven’t heard a word, and my attempts to get information from the University have had inconsistent results. Can anyone help me?

Yours sincerely  
NICK TREFETHEN  
Mathematical Institute

Meanwhile, an update on the *Magazine*’s new scheme for inviting questions from staff members on matters of concern to them for forwarding to Wellington Square for authoritative answers. So far we have forwarded three questions. As yet we have received no answers.

Questions and answers will be published in our new Q&A column as soon as possible; answers will be forwarded to questioners themselves as soon as they are received. We remind readers that their names will only be revealed to Wellington Square or published in the Q&A column with their prior agreement, in order to allow greater freedom for staff to raise controversial or sensitive issues with safety.

Please send us your questions.

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